

White Violets

By VIRGINIA BLAIR.

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Out of the darkness Margaret said, "Then every one knows it?"

"Every one but you, my dear. Over at the Country club it is common talk."

"But, Aunt Clara," vehemently, "they gossip so at the hotel."

"This isn't gossip, I've known it for a long time, Margaret."

"Oh—the sigh was almost a sob—he has always seemed such a gentleman."

"He has the training of one," Mrs. Kent affirmed. "His mother is charming."

After a moment's silence Margaret broke out, "But he saved my life, Aunt Clara."

There was a rustle of skirts as Mrs. Kent moved impatiently in her chair. "Yes, and that's the worst of it."

Mrs. Kent ended the longer silence that followed by ringing for lights. "No, no," Margaret protested. "I like it better with just the fire."

"But I must go, dear, and dress for dinner, and you will be so dreary alone in the dark."

As she rose and stood by the couch her caressing fingers touched Margaret's cheek and found tears on it.

"You'd better have the lights," she said, and there was a worried note in her voice. "I hate to leave you here alone."

"Oh, I shall be all right," Margaret said. "I'll lie here in the dark and pet Toodlekins."

Still protesting, Mrs. Kent found her way out, and after a time in the big room there came the sound of a stifled sob, and another and another, and after that everything was very quiet. The flame of the fire died down. The green eyes of the little cat, snuggled close to her mistress, glowed in the blackness.

The click of an electric button and the flare-up of lights brought Margaret's head out of the cushion where she had buried it. She shielded her face with her hand.

"You are early, Uncle Dick."

"I'm late. What's the matter with the lights? Why didn't you get somebody to look after them?"

"I like the dark."

"Queer taste." He gave her a keen glance and sat down in the chair by the couch. "How's the foot?"

"It hurts a little, but it's going to be all right."

"Everybody at the club is talking about your accident. They are making a regular hero of Ridgeway." He settled himself back in the big chair and smiled at her genially. "He must have had the strength of a Hercules to hold those horses back."

"He's awfully strong," Margaret said and sat up. "His college record in athletics is fine."

"He flunked in some of his studies, though," Mr. Kent teased.

Margaret's face flamed, "I know." She smoothed the little cat with nervous fingers. "Is—is he very ill, Uncle Dick?"

"Who—Ridgeway? Um—well, that depends. He's a mighty nice fellow, Peggy." He caught the eagerness of her eyes and pulled himself up. "That is—oh, well, your Aunt Clara wouldn't exactly approve of him, and—and I don't know that he's just the friend for you, Margaret."

"Oh!" came in fluttering protest, and after that Margaret lay with her eyes closed, and nothing was said for several minutes.

"Tired, little girl?" asked her uncle finally, and when she nodded he stood up.

"I must go and dress for dinner." He hesitated by the couch, looking down at her until she opened her eyes and held out her hand and said, "Dear Uncle Dick," and then he patted her cheek and said a little huskily, "Cheer up."

This time there was no friendly darkness to hide the tears, so Margaret dabbed at them with her handkerchief and stared until a ring of the front door bell brought her to an upright position.

"It's Mr. Ridgeway," the maid announced.

"I'm afraid I can't see him!" Margaret said nervously.

"Please," boomed a big voice from the hall—"please don't turn me out like that."

"Oh, well," Margaret agreed, and the maid's place between the curtains was usurped by a young man as big as his voice, who came over and picked up the pussy cat and dropped a small square box in its place. "If you'll let me pet Toodlekins I'll let you have some flowers," he said, and as he sat down the little cat curled into the hollow of his arm and sang her song of contentment, unruffled by the change.

There were white violets in the box, and Ridgeway said, his big voice softened by some fine emotion, "They always make me think of you."

"Oh, don't, don't!" Margaret said with quick caught breath, and Ridgeway stared at her in a puzzled way.

"Don't you like them?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, it's a funny way to show it." There was so much of the boy in him that Margaret smiled in spite of herself.

"It's because I like them so well that I don't want you to bring them to me any more."

"You don't?"

"I mean it," she said faintly. "You mustn't bring me any more flowers."

"Why not?"

"Because I can't take them."

"Why can't you take them?"

"Because—"

"That isn't any reason," he flung out. "Do you mean that you don't want me to come?"

She held out one slim hand to him. "Don't," she said beseechingly—"don't speak to me like that. We must always be good friends, but you mustn't come."

He took her hand. "It's to be just—friends?"

"Yes."

"Never anything more?"

"Never."

"And yet that night after the accident you let me kiss you—Margaret."

"Yes," very low.

The fire flickered and sapped. The little cat, disturbed somewhat, slipped down from Ridgeway's arms and curled herself up on the rug.

"Would you mind," Margaret said at last, "turning off the upper light? The strong glare hurts my eyes."

The rosy halo of the lamp made dark the distant corners of the room. Margaret on her couch was a dim outline. The little cat was invisible except for her emerald eyes. Ridgeway came back and sat down; then he bent forward.

"Margaret," he said sharply, "you are crying."

"Yes," she sobbed, "I'm crying—oh, because you are such a black sheep, Justin."

He drew his breath sharply. "So that's it?" he said at last.

"Yes, I didn't know until tonight, Aunt Clara told me."

He stood up. "Then there's nothing more to say. Goodbye."

He went to the door, hesitated and came back.

"Look here, Peggy," he said grimly, "if I were a story book hero I'd take my medicine and go away and suffer in silence. And it would all be very tragic and romantic, but it wouldn't be sensible."

He threw himself into the big chair and knitted his brows. "The sensible thing is to get over the difficulty. Let's begin at the beginning. Everybody says I'm a black sheep?"

"Yes," she murmured.

"Well, I am. I've wasted my time in riotous living, as the Bible says of the prodigal, and when I flunked in my studies I got what was coming to me. But that was before I met you, Peggy. I don't think my worst enemy could accuse me since the night I saw you at the junior prom in your white gown, with your hair twisted up in a big braid like a crown. You seemed the princess in a fairy tale, and I made up my mind then and there that I'd win you."

He drew a long breath and went on: "But now I know I'm not good enough, and I know, too, that I have not any right to ask you to wait for me. All I'll ask is that you don't condemn me utterly, don't shut me out from your life."

His voice broke. Then as she held out her hand to him he went on steadily:

"I'm only going to ask that you will believe in me and if, after two or three years, no one else has come into your life that you care for and I have made good, that you will let me plead my cause again."

He stood looking down at her. Her cheek was laid against the bunch of white violets. Their delicate fragrance was roundabout her.

"Dear little girl," he said, "I'll stick it out at college another year, and then I'll go into business with dad and show him what I can do. And if you will have faith in me!"

She sat up, her eyes shining. "Oh," she said, "I felt that back of it all there was a man in you, Justin—and then—when you saved my life—I felt that it belonged to you."

"I'm not half good enough," he said humbly.

She took from the bunch of violets a half dozen blossoms and held them out to him.

"They shall be a talisman," she said. "of faith and hope and love. You must let them keep you from all evil, Justin."

And as he knelt beside the couch the rapture in his eyes answered her.

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No. 52—St. Louis Express, 10:05 a. m.
No. 54—St. L. Fast Mail, 10:23 p. m.
No. 92—C. & St. L. Lim., 6:06 a. m.
No. 56—Hopkinsville Ac. 8:55 p. m.
No. 94—Dixie Flyer, 5:53 p. m.

TRAINS GOING SOUTH.

No. 51—St. L. Express 5:32 p. m.
No. 53—St. L. Fast Mail 5:35 a. m.
No. 93—C. & N. O. Lim. 11:50 p. m.
No. 55—Hopkinsville Ac. 7:05 a. m.
No. 95—Dixie Flyer, 9:43 a. m.
No. 53 and 54 connect at St. Louis and other points west.

No. 51 connects at Guthrie for Memphis, La. p. into as far south as Elgin and for Louisville and Cincinnati and the East.

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EFFECTIVE OCT. 17, 1908.

EAST BOUND.

No. 12 Clarksville and Nashville Mail leaves6:30 a. m.
No. 14 Clarksville and Nashville Mail leaves.....4:00 p. m.

WEST BOUND.

No. 11 Clarksville and Hopkinsville mail arrives...11:20 a. m.
No. 13 Clarksville and Hopkinsville mail arrives... 8:15 p. m.

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